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Julian Bourg. *From Revolution to Ethics: May 1968 and Contemporary French Thought.* Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007. Illustrations. ix + 468 pp. $32.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7735-3199-4.

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The Ethical Turn in Post-1968 France

Forty years after the famous revolution of 1968, the time has come for a complex analysis of its inheritance. This analysis takes into account the more hidden signification of this revolution, and therefore eludes at the same time its supporters and its detractors, from both left and right. Such is the lesson of an excellent study, which Julian Bourg dedicates to the phenomenon of a revolution that marked profoundly the last decades of the twentieth century, and that does not cease resounding in our time. In Bourg's study, the events of 1968 appear in all their social, political, psychological, media, and philosophical complexity. At the same time, however, the examples that Bourg chooses to realize the book's objective, that is, "to show that a turn to ethics occurred, and to demonstrate how and why it did," are relatively limited (p. 5). Thus, it is not primarily the revolution of 1968 as such that interests the author, but, rather, its legacy, as it is perfectly summed up in the title of the work: *From Revolution to Ethics.*

The book is composed of four parts further divided into chapters, two additional separate chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. In the introduction, Bourg sets up the book's objectives, while explaining some key interpretative notions. One of them is "antinomy," from the Greek *anti-nomos* (against the law), which allows him to speak of the antinomian ethos of 1968, and to regroup under this name several phenomena triggered by revolutionary thought. Bourg also announces his intention to participate in two debates: on the history of "French theory" and with "existing English-language histories of postwar France" (p. 11). It is necessary to say that his voice belongs to the most important ones in these debates today insofar as Bourg abandons old clichÃ©s and sees problems in a new light. For Bourg, the paradox of 1968 is that the event considered as a failure of the revolution, i.e., the treason of the revolutionary ideals sensu stricto and the passage to ethical discourse, constitutes in fact its success.

While the first chapter of *From Revolution to Ethics* offers a short outline of events of May 1968, its reasons, and interpretations (in which May continues "to play its role as an intellectual, cultural, and political Rorschach

test" [p. 30]), the first part of the book analyzes the role and the functioning of some leftist groups in 1968 and afterwards. Notably, Bourg concentrates on the examples of Gauche prolÃ©tarienne (Proletarian Left) and Groupe d'information sur les prisons (the Prison Information Group) that show the de-radicalization of the post-1968 movements, which took place in the next decade.

The second part examines the significance of the book phenomenon of Gilles Deleuze and FÃ©lix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983). Their ideas, based on the anti-psychiatry and philosophy of desire–conceptions introduced by Bourg with great attention–are analyzed in the context of their sources, that is, of Guattari's experiences with Institutional Psychotherapy and of Deleuze's work on Benedict Spinoza. This perspective allows to recognize the importance of *Anti-Oedipus* for the ethical turn, "even though this detour in some ways became a dead end" (p. 108).

It is the inheritance of the sexual revolution that constitutes the object of the third part. More precisely, the focus is on the conflict between leftist masculine movements, persuaded of the right to free expression of desire, and feminists, who, within the framework of the debate on rape and pedophilia, insisted on the necessity to institute certain legal limits, which, at first glance, seemed to contradict the revolutionary ideals. This moment constitutes, therefore, the critical point in the self-definition of several French intellectuals of that epoch, as well as in the realization that sometimes one needs "to forbid in the name of liberation" (p. 222).

The fourth part focuses on the figures of New Philosophers: Bernard-Henri LÃ©vy, AndrÃ© Glucksmann, and others. Working in the wake of 1968, they mark a return to a moralistic, or even religious, tradition (Jansenism). Together with such big personalities of the French philosophy of the twentieth century as Paul Ricoeur, Vladimir JankÃ©lÃ©vitch, and Emmanuel Levinas, analyzed in the last separate chapter, the New Philosophers confirm the completion of the "turn to ethics." Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault also support the latter as, during the last years of their lives, they put ethics in the center of their philosophical concerns. In conclusion, Bourg examines consequences of the "turn to ethics" during recent years in France, by emphasizing its "renewal of civil society" that can be spotted especially at the level of associations and institutions.

All in all, it would be difficult to overrate the value of Bourg's work, which not only offers "a partial corrective to interpretations of 1968 that have predominated in France," but also gives a very rich account of the social, cultural, and political life of contemporary France (p. 41). The reading of *From Revolution to Ethics* confirms that "no tidy tally of the 1968 period is possible, since its legacy remains ambiguous" (p. 332). It also shows that if "we live in the age of ethics," and given the decrease in value of the notion of ethics recently, it is greatly thanks to the inheritance of 1968 (p. 334).

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